

## STUDENTS AGAINST STARTING SMOKING (SASS)

The Students Against Starting Smoking (SASS) grant initiative is made possible through an interagency agreement with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Every two years, DHMH re-establishes a two-year Memorandum of Understanding with MSDE for school-based Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Activities. DHMH hosts an annual SASS training session (conference) with participating schools.

Each year, the SASS initiative is offered to all of Maryland's school districts to: teach middle school students the skills necessary to avoid the use of tobacco products; empower middle school students to become advocates for smoke-free environments; and, promote smoke-free lifestyles as a social norm among student populations. Within the SASS initiative, the year culminates with the statewide SASS conference at which SASS members and adult advisors are involved in tobacco control training. The activities completed by SASS Clubs contribute to the overall decline in youth tobacco use within the state of Maryland.

In Maryland, SASS Clubs have existed since 1993. For FY 2007-2008, there is a total of 14 clubs located in ten Maryland counties with over 300 middle school student participants. Each year, the SASS Conference consistently attracts a minimum of 250 students and adult advisors, and the SASS Conference is the most successful component of the SASS initiative. In FY 2008, 15 SASS Clubs attended the two SASS conferences held in April and May.

Students who attend the SASS Conference:

- Understand the health effects of tobacco use
- Have the ability to counter social influences and tobacco messages
- Assist teenage smokers and smokeless tobacco users in their attempts to quit
- Make positive decisions
- Demonstrate the ability to resist peer pressure
- Gain the knowledge and skills to integrate tobacco prevention into school activities

Over 200,000 Maryland students are reached each year through peer programs such as SASS. Some of the activities sponsored by SASS Clubs that students are exposed to include: Great American Smoke Out; Red Ribbon week; Kick Butt Day; World No Tobacco Day; Tobacco Free Kids Week; poster contests; commercial contests, newsletters; anti-tobacco messages in school announcements; movie critiques; smoke-free dances; letters to a loved one to quit smoking; anti-tobacco presentations and assemblies; community service projects; table and bulletin board displays; skits; and, theater presentations.